

GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS

CEOs Conference Call – COVID-19 Crisis

Friday, March 20, 2020

10:15 am

GACVB WELCOME TO THE CALL

On behalf of the GACVB Board of Directors, we want to welcome you to this special call. We have received a number of questions from your “colleagues in crisis” re: CVB operations during this COVID-19 disruption that led us to offer this hour together to hear some friendly voices from your GA tourism family and gain some takeaways as we as leaders manage our way out of this historic event.

If you are not getting our e-newsletter please email me separately after the call. If you have any IT difficulty email me following.

We have over 60 cities/destinations on the call.

As stated in the call evite, our tele-panelists for this first effort are Joe Marinelli - Visit Savannah, Lisa Smith - Georgia's Rome Office of Tourism, Bennish Brown - Augusta CVB, and Peter Bowden - VisitColumbusGA

SUBMITTED QUESTIONS – six areas of operations

1. *Hotel Communications:* What do you hear from CVBs and/or local governments, tips / suggestions, about what they are doing to help keep the hotels from closing?
2. *Our Budgets:* How many months are you planning for if / with little to no lodging tax revenue? What and how are you doing shifts in staffing / payroll and programs to survive until revenues come back? What are DMOs doing today to cut costs without having to furlough or lay off staff?
3. *Local business support:* How can we truly support beyond saying it to support our business communities? ...A lot of us are really pushing the curbside/to-go pick up orders with our restaurants. They are in survival mode and are taking it day by day. I assume we are going to begin getting a lot of pressure from residents and others to stop promoting restaurants. What are others doing to mitigate people being on both sides of the fence... The restaurants who desperately need us, and the people who think everyone should be staying at home, period.
4. *Convention Centers:* Tips for communicating with local Convention / conference centers and has anyone heard of any money coming for Convention Centers like we have heard for airlines, hotels, and other businesses? Can we advocate for Convention Centers in that language?
5. *Tips for Communications and PR strategy moving forward?*
6. *VIC Operations:* We are all conflicted. We want to show support for our local business. Who has decided that it's in their best interest to close their Visitors Center doors?

PANEL INPUT

Joe Marinelli, Visit Savannah

- Laying off Part Time staff – Work From Home optional for Full Time
- Associate's son coming down with symptoms - Son works for rental car agency at airport
- Facebook private page for staff - They also have a phone tree to get calls done among their staff
- Emergency lock down
- Convention Center is closed, groups cancelling, trying to communicate a postpone and rebook message, but associations may not have the finances to do so and is probably a loss until next year
- Hotel Communications - Michael Owens Tourism Leadership Council (TLC) met with hoteliers on Monday - same as what's going on around the state – one of the most prominent hoteliers became very critical of VisitSavannah – four-pronged approach

1. Continue to post aspirational messages on social media
2. Tourist in your Hometown Campaign
3. Develop a regional drive market approach
4. Working with Hilton Head for regional air travel promotions

Went on to say the team was preparing these now and implement at the first flicker of recovery - hotelier wanted them to be marketing right now to drive market and indicated it was their fault the situation is as it is- other hoteliers then started to criticize as well. Joe sent a list of efforts to staff, board and elected officials - not going to succumb to the short sightedness of the hoteliers. They are feeling the pressures of zero occupancy and layoffs - but it is important to remember what is happening globally in the industry.

Peter Bowden, VisitColumbusGA

- Budget - calling hotels for occupancy - gathered from other sources single digit to no income for at least 8 weeks to maybe early June.
- Moving into a recovery mode - how much cash do you (CVB) have - still need to provide a message and be ready for a recovery campaign
- Talking to City of Columbus - expect no assistance; seeking a line credit from banks; looking for federal stimulus package
- Convention Center - team has worked to help rebooking or suggestion additional dates - team is doing mostly customer service - letting planners know they are here for them - basically go to zero in conventions only one event still on March books - a wedding

- PR Strategy moving forward - awareness - local component to support hospitality industry; sending regular communications with new news curbside or delivery options, creative team is working on the recovery plan - don't know what that looks like right now. Columbus is a drive market and that's a benefit right now. As soon as light at the end of the tunnel is visible, they'll turn it all on and mainly use social to spread the message

Bennish Brown, Augusta CVB

- Augusta & Co. (Visitor Center) - closed since Monday afternoon - staff went to remote working on Tuesday through - April 6. At the time of the decision there were two confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Augusta. There are now 9 confirmed cases.
- Convention Center - we are in communication with them, 1 property responded last week they were at 50% this week they were at 20% and hourly workers are being cut - Reunions are also cancelling - Sales Managers are also being dismissed. We don't get daily or weekly STR (Smith Travel Report) - we may still subscribe to that - no good news from properties.
- Doing the same as all the others - applauds the CVB team, now is the time to be the voice of the hospitality community.

Lisa Smith, Georgia's Rome Office of Tourism

- Floyd County ban effective yesterday to close entertainment establishments and to do curbside takeouts
- Printed posters for that with DDA
- Promoting outdoors, parks and what you can still go do – following CDC guidelines
- Lodging communication - ditto we have been talking - have layoff rates as well- told them about some of their efforts to be ready for rebound
- PR Strategy - doing the same as Columbus and Savannah and also in a sit and wait mode

Attendee Comments / Questions:

Ellen Cartersville/Bartow County - 26 confirmed cases and 12 more expected this afternoon - keeping everyone paid including PT staff for as long as we can... Ellen added that drive through testing is happening at their convention center. This morning the testing team thanked the CVB for their help.

Question: I've cancelled every contract, PR Billboard digital, everything that is nonessential to keep payroll flowing. We're not going to have financial problem until July because of I-75 traffic least at 60%? Has anyone gone that far? We have given everyone (these vendor contracts) a two-month notice that it will ended

Joe in Savannah - risk of danger in cancelling every contract with vendors they need the business as much as we do - they are trying to suspend contracts - we are going to need them and they are going to need us

Rachelle Beasley - Albany CVB - many cases here. We have all but shut down most of the city restaurants, bars to curbside takeout delivery - all entertainment venues and night clubs gyms – seeing reduced numbers in grocery stores - calling hoteliers and lending an ear - helping attractions to stay relevant time for them to go out and get more social media - have them tell families to post reviews and leave pictures - attractions have time on their hands and now is the time they can do that

Question: Is anyone else doing anything earth shattering that can help us smaller CVBs/communities?

Sarah Ostuw Gordon County Chamber / Calhoun - promote the hoteliers are offering special rates for healthcare workers. Some hotels are offering rates for people who need to quarantine healthy people.

GACVB WRAP UP COMMENTS

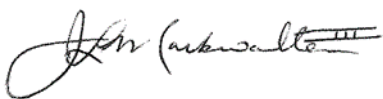
Thank you for your time and continued local leadership. Please know that Explore Georgia's Cheryl Hargrove and Brittney Gray along with Monica Smith from Southeast Tourism Society were also on the call in support and to hear from our partners.

Further addressing the PR Strategy interest on this call, we will be sending you some PR tips and information provided to us by our GACVB corporate member Pineapple Public Relations.

PLEASE take a moment (only 10 seconds) to complete (by 12 Noon E.T. today) the U.S. Travel Association's Letter Sign-on to Congress for financial relief/support for the travel industry.

It is hard to believe that most of us were all together less than a month ago in South Georgia at our conference, and we look forward to being together again soon. We are here for you! We love you, our Georgia tourism family. Here's to the weekend, and keep up the good work!

We will send you these call notes. The call is adjourned and stay tuned...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Markwalter", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Respectfully submitted by Jay Markwalter, GACVB Executive Director